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ABSTRACT

A marital argument over the content of a previous conversation is analyzed using an interactive discourse analysis approach. The analysis focuses on the frequency and use of particular discourse strategies to show how marked use of these strategies may not only typify speakers who share similar "high involvement" conversational styles, but also may be used and progressively modified within the structural and contextual framework provided by the argument. The role played by gender differences is also addressed, to demonstrate that the participants' discourse strategies were more reflective of their intent to maximize outcomes, or the interaction of these two phenomena, than their differences in gender. Some preliminary conclusions are drawn about the strategic use of discourse devices and their relationship to the progression of conflict within the argument's larger structural framework. (MSE)

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'Eating Humble Crow':
Interactional Discourse Analysis of a Marital Argument

(abbreviated title)
Discourse Analysis of a Marital Argument

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Abstract

One of the more problematic aspects of sociolinguistic research is the challenge of capturing certain commonplace and naturally occuring conversations which-by their very nature-are elusive. This paper is intended as a contribution to an interactive discourse analysis approach to the study of such a conversation; a spontaneous conversational argument between spouses. In the paper, I analyze one example of marital conflict to argue that there are linguistic strategies and structural features which appear to be characteristic of this form of discourse. I examine various features of the argument to contend that the participants' conversational styles and gender differences contribute to the expansion of the argument as a whole, and are related to-and may typify-the progressive stages or phases of this kind of intimate conversational disagreement. Specifically, I focus on the frequency and use of particular discourse strategies to show how marked use of these strategies may not only typify speakers who share similar "high involvement" conversational styles (Tannen 1984), but also that they are employed and progressively modified within the structural and contextual framework provided by the argument. I also address the role played by gender differences, to demonstrate that participants' discourse strategies were more reflective of their intent to maximize outcomes, or the interaction of these two phenomena, than their differences in gender. Finally, I provide some preliminary conclusions regarding the strategic use of discourse devices, and their relationship to the progression of conflict within the larger structural framework of the argument, as were suggested by the data.

'Eating Humble Crow': Interactional Discourse Analysis of a Marital Argument

1. Introduction

This paper is intended as a contribution to an interactive discourse analysis approach to the study of conversation. It is the study of conversation, however, of a particular kind. For, in this paper, I will be analyzing one example of an intimate verbal conflict between spouses to argue that there are linguistic strategies and structural features which appear to be characteristic of this naturally occurring form of discourse. I will be examining portions of the argument to contend that the participants' conversational styles and gender differences contributed to the expansion of the argument as a whole, and are related to-and may typify-the progressive stages or phases of this kind of intimate conversational disagreement. Specifically, I will be focusing on the frequency and use of particular discourse strategies to show how marked use of these strategies may not only typify speakers who share similar "high involvement" conversational styles (Tannen (1984)), but also that they are employed and progressively modified within the structural and contextual framework provided by the argument. I will also address the role played by gender differences, to demonstate that participants' discourse strategies were more reflective of their intent to maximize outcomes, or the interaction of these two phenomena, than their differences in gender. Finally, I will provide some preliminary conclusions regarding the strategic use of discourse devices, and their relationship to the progression of conflict within the larger structural framework of the argument, as were suggested by the data.

The participants in this argument are upper middle class, white, urban, highly educated combatants. And, to further confound objective analysis, the author of this paper is one of the participants. However, although my

participant status imposes a key constraint on the analysis, and the act of transcribing itself provides an opportunity for unconscious value judgements to interfere with objectivity, with the aid of disciplined subjectivity (Bateson (1984)) I feel these issues can be dealt with effectively. Moreover, there is precedent for gainful use of oneself as participant; following the traditions of Lakoff (1973), Schiffrin (1984) and Tannen (1984) among others, I have used myself as a source of data. I ask readers to accept my claim that this was, indeed, an instance of marital conflict, as well as other statements which are the consequence of first-hand observation and the author's long-standing and intimate association with her antagonist-among them that the argument was unplanned, spontaneously recorded, and altogether typical.

2. The Theoretical Framework

I have approached this conversational argument from a combination of contemporary, to some degree overlapping, sociolinguistic perspectives.

First, I have found the framework provided by Gumperz (1977, 1979, 1982), Lakoff (1973,1975,1979) and Goffman (1981) with regard to conversational and persuasional styles, interactive discourse strategies, and-more specifically-the discourse strategies which may typify certain types of speakers, to be relevant in shedding light on the data. With regard to the linguistic features which characterize differences in conversational style and 'New York conversational style' in particular, I have found the work of Tannen (1984, 1986) and Schiffrin (1984) to be the most useful. As backround to the participants' management of the conversation, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's classical work on turn-taking in conversations (1974) has provided a solid foundation. Additionally, in considering the use of specific linguistic devices, I have primarily relied on the approaches of Tannen (1985, 1986a) and Johnstone (1985) on repetition; Polanyi (1978) on

false starts and hesitations; Sacks (1971) on sound sequences and "touch offs"; Schegloff (1981) and Schiffrin (1985) on discourse markers. Finally, I have relied on discourse analysts who have addressed the organization, structure and management of conversational argumentation in particular, such as Jacobs and Jackson (1980, 1981), Schiffrin (1986), and Ballmer (1984) who has proposed an argumentation model based on studies of the structural and content elements of textual and spoken argumentation.

Second, my analysis has taken into consideration the approaches of other sociolinguists who have studied language use with regard to gender, and the linguistic features which appear to characterize gender differences in language use. Especially useful, in this regard, are studies which treat gender-related linguistic variation as cross-cultural differences, and which approach the differences between mens' and womens' speech as indicators of larger socio-cultural inequalities, or as culturally conditioned patterns of behavior.

Tannen (1982, 1986), Lakoff (1973) and Goffman (1976) exemplify the many authors who have targeted culturally conditioned gender differences as contributors to conversational and social understanding, and as essential aspects of stylistic strategies. While, broadly speaking, the features which constitute conversational style can be described in terms of speakers' choice of prosodic and linguistic strategies (Tannen (1984)), with regard to gender-related stylistic differences, I have limited the definition to the co-occurring linguistic patterns and features which are associated with men and women. We may then ask how well previous conclusions regarding these differences 'fit' our data -a verbal conflict between husband and wife.

With regard to this question, the studies extant which bear on the subject are as numerous as they are diverse in focus, and often they are intriguingly divergent in their findings. For example, Zimmerman and West (1975) argued

for a greater preponderance of male interruptions in mixed gatherings, yet Beattie (1981) found no differences in either the frequency or type of interruptions used; would we find evidence in support of either claim in the argument? Others (Soskin and John (1963), Bales (1950), as examples)) have distinguished differences between the sexes in emotional expressiveness (i.e., "instrumental" vs "expressive" use of language); is that borne out in the text? Hirschman (1974), among others who studied discourse markers and back channel cues (see prior citations), focused on gender differences in use of "um-humm", finding that women use this feature more often than men. Is their level of use in the data consistent with prior findings, and/or to be interpreted as supporting Fishman's contention (1983) that conversations are largely under male control (in terms of topics, interruptions), but are produced by 'female work' (such as asking questions)? Indeed, are linguistic strategies which contribute to achieving conversational dominance or control (Strodtbeck 1951), or conversely, which limit or reduce conversational dominance, control and status (Lakoff (1973), Kramer (1974), others)) a useful way to look at conversational argumentation, and-specifically-the role played by interruption in providing a context for control? Actually, all research which explores differences in male/female talk is pertinent to this two-party conversation. Yet, while useful for identifying some verbal strategies, they also fall short in explaining the overall purpose served by argumentation between spouses, or the complexity of this interaction.

3. Review of The Data and Argument, Including Setting and Participants

The data for this study was provided by transcribing a taped recording of an argument held on January 17, 1986 which lasted for approximately 30 minutes. There were only two participants: husband and wife. Both are of Jewish heritage, were born in New York City (The Bronx and Brooklyn,

respectively) and have resided for a majority of their adult lives in New York (Long Island), raising their three children. They also share a considerable amount of educational and professional experience in common; the husband holds a PH.D in Electrical Engineering, and the wife has two masters degrees (MS, MBA) and is now working toward another (MS/PHD program). The husband for many years was President of a telecommunications company; the wife similarly spent several years in the private sector, and left holding the grade of Vice-President for a banking subsidiary.

The argument proper was held in their dining room, after dinner, and had its roots in two previous exchanges; one which occurred earlier in the day, and one which occurred two-three weeks previously. Each of these prior conversations influenced the contents of the argument that evening, thus will be discribed briefly before I end the section with a summary of the argument.

First, approximately three weeks before the argument took place, while both participants were watching a television show ("Dynasty"), the husband again brought up a topic he had mentioned several times before: his intent to purchase an oil painting for his office. His comments were triggered by seeing an oil painting (very briefly) which was part of the setting in the TV show, which was (he said) just the right kind and size he wanted for his office. His wife responded that it didn't appear to be large enough, and that if he wanted an example of American Western art (the genre of interest) he probably would have to settle for something smaller than he wanted. For, to the best of her knowledge, based on similar paintings she had seen, none would be that large.

On the afternoon of the argument, the husband returned home from a business trip in New York. During the trip, he (it turned out) had been able to find out more about such artwork. The statements he made immediately upon arrival formed the basis for later conflict; a "starting point" as it were, for the ostensible topic of dispute-their differing recall of the previous

conversation. That afternoon's "memorable" exchange, both husband and wife agree, (untaped) went something as follows:

Husband: (calling from downstairs, right after entering the house):

Hello up there. How would you like to eat "humble crow"?[1]

Wife: Hi.....Well, that would depend on how it's served.....

There followed a short conversation, in which the husband stated he had found "proof positive" that an earlier statement made by his wife was in error. His wife then asked what it was that she had said "that was wrong". He volunteered his recall of the prior conversation; "You said (3 weeks ago) that they didn't come that size!", to which his wife responded "I didn't say any such thing-I just said I had never seen any that size!"

As a brief digression, it is interesting to note here the comments made by Kramarae (1981, p. 129) regarding the "relative power" aspects of marital decision-making:

> "...very little information is available...except the evidence that spouses often do not agree on what has happened and who has said what during discussions...in general, they (researchers) have been concerned primarily with finding the "truth", not with perception differences except as they interfere with the search for the "truth".

This observation is interesting because a superficial interpretation of the data would tend to support the conclusion that the argument was based entirely on divergent recall of events, and further-like those researchers after the "truth"-that the participants were primarily concerned with determining what was actually said, treating perceptual differences only as argumentation "tools" for supporting their version of "reality". However, as hinted earlier, this interpretion may not be descriptively accurate. For, in my judgement, and based on actual exchanges, another and equally tenable description of the "real topic of dispute" is possible; one which may be summarized as "Why do you want to *get* me on this?". Thus, by not taking into

account "perception differences", one runs the risk of accepting only one party's version of events. However, in broad outline, the argument was opened with open hostility over the husband's "humble crow" remark, and then was expanded to wider conflict over their recall of a previous conversation- involving who had the "memory flaw", if any, and presentation of individual arguments (i.e., who's right).

4. Conversational Styles, Discourse Strategies and Stages of Conflict

Without benefit of Bach (1968) and his fight training treatment program for learning how to "fight fair", but armed with the experience gleaned from long term constructive (and destructive) airing of antagonisms, the battle strategies of marital partners are almost certainly not likely to be bound by conscious considerations of "therapeutic" outcomes. As well-given the highly variable and idiosyncratic nature of human expression-it is difficult to generalize the form, structure and patterns to be found in this example of spontaneous verbal conflict.

However, our participants' individual conversational styles, certain ritualized patterns of interaction, and intimately shared expectations/ inferences (not to mention all the socio-cultural factors-age, sex, social class, etc-which affect speech and its evaluation) do tend to bind them to verbal discourse strategies which significantly affect their interactions. Further, the manner and timing in the employment of these strategies suggest that there are not only several key features which appear to distinguish it from other, non-conflict laden conversations, but that the whole can be shown to evidence progressive stages-which may be equally characteristic of this type of conversational argument.

Given the cultural backrounds of the participants, we are not surprised to find that their discourse styles very nearly match those identified by Tannen

(1981, 1984) as being "highly involved" and typical of the "New York Jewish" conversational style. Of the several features which appear to typify this discourse, those prosodic and linguistic features such as rapid pace and turn-taking,marked use of overlapping and latching of utterances, highly expressive intonation, persistence in the face of overt challenge or rebuttal, and repetition mark these speakers as ideal (if not stereotypic!) representatives of a New York conversational style. Further, their overt- and seemingly enthusiatic-willingness to cooperate in the continuation of conflict is also altogether typical of Jewish cultural norms of sociability, as Schiffrin (1984) has pointed out. Practical confirmation that these stylistic features are characteristic of these speakers will be provided by examples drawn from transcript, as they occur within the larger, logical structure of the argument as it progresses through its various phases.

The manner and frequency of use of these, and gender-related discourse strategies also contribute to distinguishing this interaction from other non-conflict laden conversations. Given the nature of conversational argumentation, of which disagreement between spouses can be said to be a commonly occurring example, it can be presumed that both parties to marital disagreement are primarily intent on gaining tactical-hence ultimate-advantage. The structure of such arguments ("having" as distinguished from "making" an argument[2]), as well as the natural state of affairs which operates to regulate such conflict (social sanctioning of verbal rather than physical violence) requires not only that the participants' verbal activity serve to justify or refute an opinion, but practically speaking, compel them to violate the Rules of Politeness (Lakoff 1973, 1975) in ways which contribute to the expansion of the argument while yet preserving involvement. While, pragmatically, this is accomplished by argumentation which consists of constellations of utterances which have a justifying or refuting function,[3] it is my contention that other, equally identifable, linguistic features may

signal conversational disagreement-and that it is marked use of these features and discourse strategies which set this form of conversational discord apart from normal conversation. As Goffman (1981) and Hymes (1973), among many others, have emphasized, social situations can have their own structures and properties which are not intrinsically linguistic in character, although they may be expressed through verbal means. We must therefore be reminded that the larger context here-whatever the verbal and non-verbal messages communicated-is a social ritual in which the expression of anger and hostility are expected outcomes. Thus, we might expect to find the ritualized expression of such anger demonstrated in discourse strategies which function to assert, if not maintain, dominance and control-above and beyond those features recognized as being "hall-marks" of our participants' New York Jewish conversational styles.

Finally, the argument appears to evidence an overall structure. There are forms and patterns in the use of certain devices and strategies which suggest phases in the process of conflict-and which are in keeping, perhaps, with both participant's perceptions of their roles in the interaction and the progression of the conflict itself. Although the participants never completely abandoned their strategies, carrying over (possibly with modification) their "tactics" from one phase of the disagreement to another, there did appear to be times when rates in use of overlapping, interruption and turn-taking varied significantly. I argue that these patterns, and the local events which reflect the "ebb and flow" of disagreement, are linked to the very process of verbal conflict itself.

Ballmer (1984) has shown, in a study of the verbal aspects of argumentation, that there can be identified representative phases in the process of conflict. The phases of the conflict process proposed by Ballmer, characterized on the discourse level by verb categories, were based on a model of verbal struggle (argumentation) consisting of the following: challenge-

attack-defend (oneself)-struggle-win/lose-cooperate. The phases identified in that conflict model, as well as the pictorialization (p.18) of the "hat structure" of verbal models in general (where the intensity of the process-or the activity intensity of the subject causing the process-starts out low, rises to reach full height, then towards the end falls down again) I believe may be applied to explain and describe equally well the phases typifying this argument. My analysis will not be dealing with vocabulary per se, but rather, the participants' use of particular discourse strategies which-as much as the verbal aspects of the discourse-appear to be related to the stages of conflict.

In what follows, I discuss and illustrate the use of these strategies, and how they varied and/or were modified as the argument progressed through its various stages. I will show that it is the markedness of their use, and their use in certain combinations, that suggest the distinctiveness of this form of conversation. My analysis will proceed within the larger framework of the phases identified, with relevant examples drawn from portions of the argument at its beginning, middle and end. Lastly, I will offer a general summary of my observations.

4.1 The First Phase:

Since the taping was begun shortly after the start of the argument, I can only provide two brief lines* (the first utterances recorded) to illustrate that an argument was being initiated:

(1) Husband: I never said anything of the sort! (angry, outraged tone)

(2) Wife: Fine! So what about Hoffstein?[4] (angry, mocking tone)

Here we can note the denial of a prior accusation by the husband (line 1) and the shifting of attention by the wife to another, and presumably equally hostile and accusatory, line of attack (line 2). These two lines "set the stage" as it were, for the first phase of the argument, which primarily consisted of a series of high pitched, rapidly paced and expressively intonated utterances,

with little or no pausing, a high degree of interrupted or truncated turn-taking, and marked use of repetition. With these lines, and those to follow, I introduce readers to the key (or tone) of the first stage: clear conflict and hostility, marked by snarly, rude, argumentative verbal displays. The features identified in the first phase are also in keeping with the general process of conflict described earlier, which would be expected to be initiated with challenges and attacks, followed by defense of one's position.

I have considered the first stage of the argument to comprise lines 1 through 163, because this section evidences features which are different in degree or kind from the middle and concluding sections. From the beginning to line 163, in addition to the significant use of sound and word repetitions, I found the highest use of interruption and overlapped utterances, together with the highest number of turns taken per speaker compared with the average number of turns per speaker from that point to the end of the argument. In fact, in no other section of the transcript do I find any amount of turn-taking that is as rapid, utterances as short, or as high a number of turn violations (interruption occurring at what would be called non-turn transition places, per Sacks et al 1974).

I illustrate the features typifying the first phase of conflict in the three excerpts to follow, which highlight the general structure and nature of the turn-taking in this stage of the argument, as well as other key features, such as repetition and sound-sequences.

Example #1:

(22) Wife: In other words...let me get this straight...you're picking on me...
(23) Husband: What picking on you...
(24) Wife: I didn't say...I/that's not...alright, you're choosing me....
(25) Husband: Choosing you,
(26) Wife: Choosing me as an object for more straightforward...conflict
(27) Husband: That's correct
(28) Wife: Because... I am safe...
(29) Husband: And closer
(30) Wife: And closer

Here we see exchanges in which each speaker quickly picks up on the phrasing used in the previous turn, to either extend the argument (line 23, asking for clarification) complete a thought (26, returning to idea introduced in line 24), or drive toward agreement (29, 30). One way to view these tactics is to interpret them as "attacking moves" in order to regain the turn and thereby control the conversation. Another interpretation is that both share similar conversational styles and/or are able, through long association, to anticipate the style of response of the other-thus are responding in kind in order to "keep up" with the general intensity and rhythm of the argument. Neither explanation excludes the other, and I would contend that both are reasonable in light of speakers' intent (to win the argument) and personal backrounds.

This brief excerpt also illustrates the significant role played by repetition in the first phase of the argument. Given the participants' conversational styles, and the routine occurrence of this feature in spontaneous conversation, we would expect to encounter its use in this discourse. However, its exaggerated use here contributes to the distinctiveness of the discourse. For, while syntactic and rhythmic patterning are features common to casual conversation (Tannen 1985, in press) I contend that it is the function and form that precise repetition takes here-augmented by, and allied to-the marked repetition and clustering of sound sequences (Sacks 1971) that distinguishes this discourse from ordinary conversation. In function, the use of sound and word repetition preserves the underlying metamessage of rapport (Bateson 1972), while simultaneously-and overtly-providing speakers with an ideal means to signal their hostility. When these devices are used in truncated, incomplete sentences or responses that take the form of two-or three-word phrases, as above, the combination amplifies this effect.

For example, the echoing by the hearer of words uttered previously (lines 22-23 "picking on me/you"; lines 24-27 "choosing me/you"; lines 29-30 "and

closer/closer") reflect the marked use of repetition. And woven into the automatic quality of these exchanges can be found a high frequency of use of the voiceless stops and related africates of (p), (k), (ch)-seen in "picking", "choosing", "conflict", "correct", "because", "closer". I interpret speakers' preference here for repeating sounds to be due to the meta-linguistic meaning derived from the quality of the sounds; put simply, they sound aggressive. By using "hard" sounds, in addition to repeating short, clipped phrases (as in lines 25, 27, 29, 30), each speaker can more fully realize their attack, and express their anger and hostility.

To further support this claim, I refer readers to the very beginning of the argument and the first seven turns of conversation (of which the first two lines were provided in the body of this paper), where the frequency of occurrence of certain other sound sequences are equally evident. In the first seven turns, totalling 70 words, 27% of the words contained the sounds of s, s, z. In light of the data, and speakers' intent, I contend that it is reasonable to conjecture a relationship between anger and its expression-and that an overt expression of hostility is being signaled by the use of "hissing" and "hard" sounds. And these metamessages of discord, when combined with lexical repetitiveness, typify the first phase of conflict.

Below, I provide another typical segment excerpted from the first phase of the argument-with my added underlining to highlight instances of repetition:

Example #2:

(57) Husband: ---- and I've changed
(58) Wife: Haven't changed
(59) Husband: Oh bullshit, I've changed too
(60) Wife: Oh yes well I changed too!
(61) Husband: 'N I say "prove it"
(62) Wife: We change
(63) Husband: How many times do I
(64) Wife: We change,
(65) Husband: How many times do I
(66) Wife: how do I prove it
and what, so what

(67) Husband: How many times have I said
(68) Wife: and you said "so what"
(69) Husband: "Prove it!"
(70) Wife: Yeah, you say so what
(71) Husband: Well, of course. My "so what" is the equivalent of ah....

Consider the number of times either party has begun to speak without waiting for a pause in the conversation or the end of a clausal phrase; I call these interruptions (as in lines 63-64; 66-67). There is also frequent use of latching, or immediate responses (as in lines 57-60, 68-70), as both argue in a primitive style reminiscent of childhood (Jacobs & Jackson 1981: the simple recycling of opposing turns) by escalating the argument in childish badgering and belligerence ("prove it"-"so what", "prove it", "yeah...so what"). These exchanges are reminiscent of childhood skirmishes which ultimately yield adversaries nothing but a stale-mate; "I did, too,"-"did not!"-"did too!"- here augmented by more mature use of explicatives (line 59), which does little to make the interaction more adult. This segment is representative of the marked use of strategies which are characteristic of a "highly-involved" speaking style (Tannen, 1984) in that there is fast rate of speech, rapid turn-taking, little or no pausing between turns (overlap and latching), and persistance. The elapsed time between line 57 and 71 is no more than 6 seconds.

Finally, we return to consideration of the repetitions to be found in this example, and the number of times the words "change", in one form or another, or "prove it" or "so what" is used. It is interesting to note that, in addition to the obvious syntactic repetitions (excluding those forced solely by speakers' desire to complete a turn, such as in line 62, continuing after interruption to line 64) there is a marked tendency for speakers to return to the sound sequences of earlier exchanges. Again, we find the more caustic and aggressive properties of sounds being put into play, as participants gravitate to the same, and/or "harder", more assertive sounds: "ch" (as in "change", repeated 6 times in some form); "p" (as in "prove it"; 3 times); "t" (as in "too", "times",

"bullshit"); "s" ("yes", "say", "so", "said"); "k" ("of course", "equivalent").

This is not to say that speakers purposefully chose these sounds-for, to great extent, the automatic quality of participants' utterances would guarantee the presence of repeated sounds. However, I do argue that more fundamental strategies are at work here, and that it is the relationship among them-and their use in tandem-that is contributing to the distinctiveness of this discourse, and especially, the first phase of the argument.

Equally evident, in the first stage of the argument, is the vying for position and attempts to gain control of the situation and topic at hand. Since the participants are vying for position in the first phase of the argument, the pace of the conversation is swift, the expression intense, and there is no pausing for contemplation. When the number of interruptions to completed turns, instances of overlapping or latching, or number of words used per turn, are compared, then-by the end of the first phase of the argument-there is evidence to support the claim that efforts are being made to take control of the situation. For example, 39 of the first 163 utterances (comprising the first phase) were interrupted after initiation, the number equally divided between husband and wife. While these numbers are significant, they do not support the prior findings of Zimmerman and West (1975) that use of interruption is asymmetrical-i.e., that men are more likely to interrupt than women in mixed conversations. However, if we consider use of these devices overall, including also the instances of overlapping and latching, we find that one-third of the discourse is marked by discourse features which suggest contention for control of the floor-albeit non-gender-related. On the other hand, turning to the issue of verbosity, we do find evidence that the husband is using more words per turn, on average, than the wife (11 to the wife's 7.5). And this is in line with previous studies which confirmed that a greater rate of talking was related to greater influence for both males and females (Strodtbeck 1951), and further supports Kenkel's findings (1963) in a similar

study, which were that high influence was related to amount of talking for males, but not for females. Thus some, but not all features previously shown to be co-occuring in male/female speech were found in the beginning stages of the argument, although-as a speech genre-conversational argumentation does evidence features and patterns suggesting attempts to dominate the interaction. The following example provides further illustration of male verbal dominance by seizing control of the topic

Example #3:

(100) Wife: How about, how 'bout this one...try this one on for size... If I really believe it and I'm right. Try that one on just for one[second
(101) Husband: [I won't do that, there[are four possibilities
(102) Wife: [try it on
(103) Husband: There are four possibilities]
(104) Wife:]Right, we're both wrong-you're right-I'm wrong
(105) Husband: Right]
(106) Wife:]I'm right-you're[wrong
(107) Husband: [Right, I'm glad you[understand
(108) Wife: [neither[one of us
(109) Husband: [Right, you understand]
(110) Wife:]Yes
(111) Husband: 'Kay, good, let's analyze each one, okay?]
(112) Wife:]Fine.

In terms of conversational style, we might conclude that both speakers, to this point, are exemplars of Tannen's "New York Style" (1984); they are rapid, intense, and highly involved speakers who (especially in argumentation) do not feel they must yield the floor to another speaker for considerateness' sake-as the above excerpt illustrates. However, on another social dimension, in terms of their style, "sex preferential" may be the most useful way to look at the matter of topic control, despite the frequency of occurrence of overlapped utterances, or interruptions.

As Kramarae (1981, p. 129) points out, in a chapter titled "Family-Ties that Bind", verbal interactions of couples will presumably reflect their division of power-and thus the types of arguments they have, who initiates them, and the topics chosen. The traditional views regarding that "division" are both stereotypic and (unfortunately) all too realistic-as this excerpt suggests. For power differences may be expressed in the way conversational topics are raised and who accepts them as viable, and men appear to hold that power (Fishman 1983). Here (as elsewhere in the first phase) there is evidence that the wife has yielded control to her husband. When the husband says "there are four possibilities" (line 101), the wife backs away from her tentative initial suggestion ("how about, how 'bout this one...", line 100), and finally gives up after another half-hearted attempt (her ignored interruption in line 102 "try it on"). It further appears that the wife has become "conversationally subordinate", by latching onto her husband's argument and taking on the job of interpreter. This is seen in lines 104 "right, we're both..."; 106 "I'm right-you're wrong"; 108 "neither one of us...". Simultaneously, by enhancing and expanding her husband's idea she gains his approval in her role as facilitator (lines 105 "Right";107 "Right, I'm glad you understand..."; 109 "Right, you understand";111 "'Kay, good, let's...").

However, since the differentiation of phases in this conflict were determined on the basis of differing strategies used by the participants as the argument progressed-before the reader settles into comfortable acceptance of participants' "winning" strategies-I will turn to discussion of the disagreement as it moves into the second stage where there can be discerned a change in tactics, and concomitant alteration in the discourse strategies.

4.2 The Second Phase:

In the second phase, both participants are enthusiastically struggling for control, but there are some marked differences in the strategies they appear

to be employing to gain it. From the beginning of the argument up to line163, the tide of battle, if measured by the amount of talk generated by Husband, is on his side. He has contributed at least 30% more, in terms of words per turn, than Wife. Between lines 66-128, the rate is 50% more. But in the middle section of the argument there is a seemingly radical reversal in roles, and in the kind and nature of turn-taking violations.

Below, I provide two excerpts: the first taken from what I consider to be the first phase of the argument, and the second from the middle, or second phase. I will then compare the roles (assertive or dependent), the length of turns taken by each speaker, and the form of those turns.

Example #4: first phase:

(138) Husband: ...Again, if-[if we're on the course
(139) Wife: [And I-and I interpret it[to mean
(140) Husband: [if-if[we're on the course
(141) Wife: [whatever I want it to mean
(142) Husband: If we're on, if we're on...the course
(143) Wife: Umhum
(144) Husband: Where we've assumed that I'm right
(145) Wife: Yes
(146) Husband: 'Kay? and you have that memory flaw
(147) Wife: Umhum
(148) Husband: Okay? and you consistently remember it differently
(149) Wife: Umhum
(150) Husband: Than the way you said it
(151) Wife: Umhum
(152) Husband: Then you didn't say what you meant!

Example #5: second phase:

(217) Husband: Okay, now...what/what would[your concl-
(218) Wife: [So I can remember what I said...or what if I said something in error.I got no problem in going back and immediately saying I got it wrong-
(219) Husband: [What would your concl.....what would your conclusion then be....since...since[...
(220) Wife: [It's not true!
(221) Husband: Right. So therefore we know what my conclusion is if I'm right. We know what the conclusion is. What is the conclusion..if you're right?

The first obvious difference in these two excerpts, is that, rather than one speaker (male) "dominating" the other through sheer verbiage, perserverence, and control of the topic (ex.#4), the roles seem to be in the process of equalizing by the second phase (ex.#5). In the first of these two examples, comparing their relative amount of talk, the husband contributes 6.75 words on average per utterance to the wife's 2.7-assuming her back-channelled "umhums" constituted the extent of her participation. Thus, if amount of talk is equated with winning, i.e., increased verbiage=increased influence, as studies by Strodtbeck (1951) seem to suggest, then there is a "winner": the husband. Further, if perserverence yields control, then the husband certainly hangs on long enough to gain it in example #4. He re-introduces a conversational topic "again, if-if we're on the course" (line 138) and despite the wife's repeated interruptions (lines 139 "And I-and I..." and 141 "whatever I...."), he clings tenaciously to the idea (lines 140 "if-if we're on the course" and ultimately succeeds (line 142 "If we're on, if we're on...the course"). Also, the wife's performance here is in contrast to her husband's earlier use of more emphatic particles as discourse markers (see husband's responses in lines 105, 109, 111: "right"; 'kay, good"). These differences substantiate Hirschman's study (1974), where women and men performed as wife and husband did, respectively.

In the second phase, while continuous vying for dominance is still apparent, and speakers appear willing to perservere until their thought can be completed, there is less willingness to submit to conversational control by "giving way". Again, while we see the husband perservering until he gains control (two attempts, lines 217, 219 and ultimate success in line 221), we also find his wife less willing to cede (lines 218, 220). Moreover, both now seem more willing to wait for times to "jump into" the conversation. In the mid-stage of the argument, husband and wife more often wait for the more traditional turn-transition places afforded by the ends of clauses and

beginnings of phrases (we see this in lines 219-220).

Between lines 163-186, we also see a radical shift in the amount of talk of talk being done. The wife contributes two-thirds more words than the husband, and this relative proportion is maintained until the end of the quarrel. This apparent shifting in the roles played by the participants, as the utterances gradually lengthen and the disruptive overlapping is gradually replaced by more cooperative interaction, is characteristic of the transitional, mid-phase of the argument.

Furthermore, while repetition continues (as this brief example shows) the form it most frequently takes is that of self-repetition. The wife might have responded, in line 220, with "your conclusion is not true"-a tactic that was commonly found in the first phase. But, in the second stage of the argument, this propensity for mimicking the words of another fades away, while repetition of one's own words continues (as the husband's repeated use of "conclusion" demonstrates).

4.3. The Third Phase

Earlier, in line 90, the husband has clearly stated his position when he said "only one of us can be right"-and attempts to resolve this difference comprises the first third of the argument. By lines 168-170 the participants had come to a critical point in the argument, when the wife volunteered a compromise solution to the effect "both of us can be right, and both of us can be wrong". However, this attempt to close down the argument with a win/win and lose/lose score-while agreed to in principle by both parties-was unsuccessful, so that by the end of the second phase they have re-cycled and expanded upon their arguments several times. Thus, while the this phase is marked by struggle-in keeping with the conflict process-the third and final stage is marked by the recycling of old information and negotiation ("cooperation"-the last phase in the conflict process).

The third, and longest stage of the argument is noted not only for high use of analogies and story-telling, which contributed to the longer turns being taken by both husband and wife, but also by a reduction in interruptions. While this may be due to their implicitly agreed upon strategies for argumentation, it also may be due to the wife's modification of strategies to attract and hold her listener's attention, and-more importantly, perhaps-general adoption of her husband's strategies. Previous gender-related differences in intonation patterns and expressiveness, associated with full disclosure of emotion vs. restraint and control, and more aggressive/quarrelsome tactics, give way to more supportive strategies which faciliate negotiation. Turn-taking is normalized, and there is change evident in the way and form repetition is used.

For example, although there remain short bouts of sarcasm and anger, and loud voices, there is gradual shifting to greater cooperation. Note the lines below, as the argument continues (underlining to highlight):

Example #6

(195) Husband: Lets's/let's discuss this hold on let's discuss this let's discuss [the specifics of/of the other two cases
(196) Wife: [Because I don't think that's the case
(197) Husband: We're/we're both wrong or both right/
(198) Wife: [Okay.
(199) Husband: [Okay? Because we were talking about specific numerical quantifiers, we weren't talking about [.....you.....hol/don/you/we weren
(200) Wife: [No. We were talking about.....

As the conflict progresses, we find the wife applying increasingly greater pressure (as her husband's insistent self-repetition confirms, in lines 195, 199), while the husband maintains his steady reliance on strategies geared to elicit positive responses (reinforcement of agreement) through repeated questions "Okay?", "right?" and statements which are of the "instrumental" type ("specifics"; "specific numerical quantifiers", also in lines 195, 199).

More importantly, we see a modification in the way repetition is used. The wife (line 196) seizes on the word "cases", but echoes it not to refute or badger, but to shift attention to another (her) idea. Furthermore, there is a noticable repetition of 1st person plural pronouns and increased emphasis on unity (the repeated "let's" in line 195, and phrasing in lines 197,199, 200- "we" and "we're").

In another example, occuring later on in the argument, we find the wife mocking her husband's earlier strategies to her advantage.

Example #7:

(271) Husband: Well, before you go too [...too far
(272) Wife: [It has to do with the roles that we play. Y'know, you...you have well a bunch of things scientific ...you would be the unrefuted expert
(273) Husband: Umhum
(274) Wife: I mean if you said the ellipsis of the ah-the-of the planet Jupiter y'know circled around the earth every ah three hundred and forty-two point five days I'd have no reason to doubt it.
(275) Husband: [Sure.

Husband and wife, in the above, appear to have reversed roles; in the first stage of the argument, the wife supplied the "umhums" most of the time; her turns were very short. Now, the husband is saying "umhum" and "sure", while his wife is continuing to interrupt but with statements that are good mimics of her spouse's previous discourse (i.e., facts, specification, categorization).

Further, once the wife gains the floor, she fills the space entirely-with little or no new information, but also with little or no room left for the husband to interject or grab a turn. The phrasing below, I argue, leaves little opportunity for the husband to break in; there are no internal "ands" or "buts" which might provide that opportunity. Conversely, the wife seizes every opportunity to break in; given the slightest break or pause, or hesitancy (as in 272, above or 277 below), she interrupts or latches onto her husband's utterance-a display of tactics which were previously mutually effective:

Example #8:

(276) Wife: And if I wish to say something as opposite as..as..as totally... opposite from that as possible on the other end of the extreme about something having to do with the quote unquote soft sciences or something having to do with human nature or god only knows what on the other end, you might accept it as some thing...as fact...

(277) Husband: Then....

(278) Wife: As we come closer to each on that continuum, you...

The third phase of the argument spanned at least 200 utterances, while both parties continued to reinforce previous contentions with decreasing enthusiasm and hostility. The wife's third and final attempt to reconcile their differences (line 328) "the most logical interpretation of what happened would be that we're both right" fails, but they are tiring of the struggle- and this is seen in the reduced amount of overlapping and interruptions, combined with an increased number of words uttered per turn.

I noted significant differences in the number of words per turn at the beginning of the argument and at the end. When I compared the first 90 turns taken by each speaker to their last 90 turns, I found the following: of the husband's first 90 turns, 12 contained more than 10 words per turn, while the wife's turns contained only 8 which had more than 10 words. Significantly, of the husband's last 90 turns, I found 31 which contained more than 10 words, compared to the wife's final 90 turns, of which 38 contained 10 words or more. Thus, not only were there contrasts in number of words spoken at the beginning and end stages of the argument, but the length of each turn also differed significantly.

However, the participants appeared to remain polarized in their positions throughout the argument, rejecting reconciliation when offered, yet unable to achieve victory. A last example illustrates the tenacity of our combatants:

Example #9:

(450) Wife: No! I know that's what you <u>think</u> I said!

(451) Husband: That's what <u>I said!</u>

(452) Wife: <u>And I'm telling you, and I'm telling you</u>....

Here, and continuing until the end of the argument (line 581), when the husband retreats from the field of battle rather than ceding victory (with the pretext of having to place a telephone call), they are maintaining their difference of opinion over what had been seen, said, and remembered from a conversation held three weeks previously. Thus the argument concludes with a stale-mate; a "stand-off" to be continued another time, in another place-though predictably taking similar form and with the participants utilizing similar strategies.

5. Summary

In this paper I have analyzed portions of a conversational argument between spouses to show how strategic and stylistic differences (at times gender-related) and their shared conversational styles (New York) and discourse strategies (highly involved) can provide a framework for-and influence-the progression of verbal conflict. I have identified the linguistic and prosodic devices which typified this form of discourse to suggest that they function in interdependent ways, and that the combined effect contributed to the distinctiveness of the discourse.

Additionally, I have argued that the features characteristic of earlier stages in the disagreement were not characteristic of later stages of the argument, or-if present-were found in altered form. This evidence suggests an overall structure to the argument, and supports my contention that conversational argument proceeds in phases generally conforming to the conflict model described by Ballmer, with each phase of the conflict characterized by a combination of particular features. That is, challenge-attack-defend strategies were characteristic of the first phase, and these tactics were evidenced by the devices shown to occur in the discourse: rapid pace, highly expressive intonation, overlapped utterances, a high level of interruptions and

marked use of sound and word repetitions. On the other hand, typical of the second phase were the continued use of devices used to gain control and dominance, as the combatants struggled with the issue and the matter of gaining advantage. With regard to turn-taking, overlapping and interruption, and repetition, by the mid-stage of the argument the participants' strategies were as much influenced by their conversational style as by gender related differences. In the final phase, the participants turned to more cooperative strategies and longer turn-taking. While neither had gained ultimate victory or suffered defeat, they had passed through the verbal activity stages of high intensity to reach more normalized conversation. In sum, there appeared to be a form and structure to this argument as it progressed from early heated exchanges (skirmishing) to mid-argument vying for control/dominance and consolidation of position, to later negotiation and withdrawal.

Also, their discourse, in the beginning phase, evidenced features associated with men's and women's speech; greater male verbosity, and efforts to dominate and control the progress of the argument by topic control and perserverence. However, there was reversal in those traditional gender differences, so that within the structure of the argument we have seen the wife adopting the discourse strategies of her husband to gain advantage. The fact that some gender differences-which have been suggested by previous studies of male/female conversation in mixed groups-were not found in large number here, and/or were modified as the argument progressed, suggests that social contexts and conversational styles of the speakers may be at least or more influential in shaping the discourse than gender differences.

* The conversation is presented in lines which represent the turns taken by the participants. To facilitate reading, the following transcription conventions have been employed:

( ) parentheses indicate "parenthetical" intonation; (---) name deletion

, comma shows clause final intonation ("more to come")

. period indicates sentence final falling intonation

? indicates rising intonation

: indicates elongation of vowel sound

.. two dots show perceptible pause of less than 1/2 second

... three dots show half second of pause; each extra dot = additional 1/2 sec.

- represents a glottal stop, abrupt cutting off of sound

UNDERLINING indicates emphatic stress unless otherwise specified

[BRACKETS connecting two lines indicates two speakers at once;
]with reversed flaps indicates LATCHING: no interturn pause

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Deborah Tannen for pointing out the significance of this fused expression, which-though repeated elsewhere in the text-never posed any difficulty for the participants in this conversation. As she has noted, (1985 forthcoming), regarding the fixed formulas of proverbs and sayings, they are "often only highly, not utterly, fixed". Thus the form of fixed expressions may be slightly varied or combined ("eat humble pie"/"eat crow"), while the meaning remains clear.

2. As pointed out by Jackson and Jacobs (1980), the conventional ways in which conversationalists structure and organize the arguments they "have" arguments are different from the kinds of arguments they "make". Structurally, they claim,"having" arguments is a special instance of the repair organizations to accepting a turn, as distinguished from repair in general-in that they occur in a context of disagreement-while "making" arguments can occur outside of having an argument.

3. The general definition, and fundamental purpose of argumentation (most authors concur) is considered to be activity which serves to justify or refute an opinion, and as such a verbal, social and intellectual activity accomplishes this purpose by directing utterances having this function towards others, in order to obtain agreement.

4. The reference to "Hoffstein" (a marriage counselor consulted four years previously) continues a topic raised at the onset of conflict by the husband, which was unrecorded. Hoffstein here symbolically stands as non-present "ally" to substantiate the husband's claims; a reference which conveys his interest in dredging up the muck of the past (the "kitchen sink" syndrome), and one sure to be viewed as an unkindly act by the wife. Nevertheless, she "accepts the gauntlet" thrown (line 2), as "all is fair in love and war!"

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